

Baby left behind after daycare locked up for the night [CA-AB]^[1]

Author: MacDonald, Jim

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EXCERPTS

A young mother whose asthmatic baby was left crying in the dark for nearly three hours Thursday after a daycare closed for the night says the child could have died.

"He was in the dark in a puddle of mucus," said Chantel Patterson, hugging six-month-old Israel in her apartment yesterday.

"He's so sick now from being left like that. If he had an asthma attack, he could have died."

Bonita Berezanski, owner of the Bear's Paw Day Care Centre, said it was "an unfortunate accident" that the child was left unattended.

She said a staff member assumed the boy had been picked up and missed the child as she locked up.

"I guess because he was sleeping, she had forgotten about him is what it comes down to," Ms. Berezanski said.

"She assumed the child had been picked up. She did the usual walk-through and safety checks.

"He sleeps around the wall, around the corner there and he got missed."

A spokesman for Alberta Children's Services said the daycare had a clean record. But Ron Bos said the incident was being taken very seriously and investigators were expected to take about a week before submitting a final report.

"We don't want to downplay this incident. It is a huge concern for us," Mr. Bos said. "Our hearts go out to the mother. It must have been incredibly upsetting for her and for her son."

Ms. Patterson, a 22-year-old single mother, said it was agonizing as she made repeated phone calls to find out why the daycare was locked and dark when she arrived about five minutes after the regular closing time of 6 p.m.

"I called 911 and they told me to wait until 7 o'clock. I called Alberta Welfare and I couldn't get through. I called the hospitals and he wasn't there," she said.

"I said I had a feeling he was inside. I waited and waited and waited out there until the owner finally arrived to unlock the door at just before 9 o'clock."

Investigators from Children's Services arrived at Ms. Patterson's home yesterday afternoon to interview her as part of their investigation, which will focus on what procedures failed.

The daycare was open for business yesterday.

"Parents are expected to sign a child in when they arrive and then sign them out again when they pick them up.

"Other things we'll ask about and investigate is did staff do the ground check, the sweep, that they're expected to do of the premises," he said.

Ms. Patterson said this was the first time she had taken her infant son to a daycare and the experience had left her shattered.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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